The Library.

Workmen's Libraries in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire.¹

I BELIEVE that during the last few years London has witnessed a great awakening on the question of the supply of popular libraries for the people, and the rapidity and thoroughness with which the libraries under the Act have been equipped and made available in London is remarkable. I have been asked to prepare a paper about a movement of a much humbler character, but which I venture to think is in its way even more remarkable than the movement which has taken place in the richest city in the world. The communities which have taken in hand the establishment of the libraries about which I have to speak to you to-day are in no sense of the term a community of rich people. They are the hard toiling delvers in the coal mines which surround this flourishing town, in the hill districts of Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire. These honest, hard-working, thrifty, and intelligent working people have endeavoured to solve for themselves, upon lines of their own, the question of providing institutions which shall comprise a library, reading room, recreation rooms, concert halls, and similar appurtenances, and the extent to which this movement has now attained fully justifies an attempt to put before you some account of its origin and progress. The fact that within the last three or four years quite a number of these institutions have been provided with costly buildings, equipped for their

¹ Read before the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Library Association, Cardiff, September, 1895.

proper work, and supplied from the earnings of the work-people with a regular income for their support, and that all these things have been produced by a voluntary tax imposed upon themselves by the work-people, of their own initiative and without any outside pressure or even outside assistance, so far as organisation is concerned, is undoubtedly very remarkable, and I hope you will bear with me while I give some account of the people who are responsible for this movement, and of the results which have attended their efforts.

In England and other parts of the United Kingdom, the characteristics and habits of the Welsh collier are very imperfectly known. He is generally regarded as brutal, doggish, uncultivated, and drunken, who delights in consuming as much bad liquor as he can manage to pour down his throat, who spends his spare hours in dog-fighting, cock-fighting, and gambling, and who takes every opportunity that presents itself to abuse his wife and thrash his children. Nothing could be further from the truth than this. The typical Welsh collier will compare favourably with any class of workman in the kingdom, and I say unhesitatingly that having regard to his position, his social environments, and the meagre educational facilities which have been within his reach in the past, it is a matter of surprise and also a subject for congratulation that he stands so high in the estimation of his fellow-countrymen and members of other nationalities who have studied his character. There are, of course, "black sheep" among Welsh colliers, but these are chiefly importations. The deep, emotional, religious fervour which permeates the Welsh character, and the solemn, pathetic, and tender feeling, so emblematic of a subdued nation, is particularly marked in the Welsh collier. To see eight or nine thousand of these hard, grimy sons of toil, assembled together on the slope of a hill for a whole day listening to the "glad tidings" proclaimed at a "Cymanfa" with a Welsh "Hwyl," as only Welshmen can do it, is a sight of very common occurrence in the colliery districts of the principality. The Welsh National Eisteddfod, which is principally supported by the Welsh collier, is admitted to be the largest and most popular literary assembly the world has ever seen. In the year 1893, a congregation of 25,000 people, belonging to one of the many religious denominations of the eastern portion of Glamorganshire, composed mostly of Welsh colliers with their wives and daughters, met together at Pontypridd to sing

the praises of the Most High, and if the representatives of the present Conference had met a week earlier, a cordial welcome would have been extended them to witness a similar gathering in the great Rosebery Hall in this town.

Moreover, his intelligence is of no mean order. Theology and the cultivation of voice singing have perhaps been his principal studies. This is accounted for by the fact that the literature within his reach was until recently very scanty. It consisted chiefly of the Bible and a few cheap theological books. The cultivation of singing has always been a favourite amusement of the Welsh collier. The children practise singing at an early age with a view of competing at Eisteddfodau and similar gatherings. At the recent National Eisteddfod at Llanelli, a male voice choir composed exclusively of colliers won the chief prize for singing. Sir Joseph Barnby, admittedly one of the greatest musical critics of this or any other age, in awarding the prize to this choir, said: "This is the finest specimen of singing I have ever heard."

Further, the collier's debating power must not be overlooked. In dealing with the complicated, abstruse, and delicate questions appertaining to Capital and Labour, he is a formidable antagonist. In trade disputes the coalowner finds him "a foeman worthy of his steel." He might occasionally "murder" the Queen's English, but in spite of the advantage his employer has over him by way of superior education and wider experience, he holds his ground with a tenacity of purpose which is truly remarkable.

This, then, is the person for whom we are striving to form colliery libraries. It is obvious to those who are acquainted with the southern portion of the principality that there are considerable difficulties in the way of forming these libraries. The most important obstacle is the peculiar geographical configuration of the district. A glance at the map will show that the coalfield is comprised of a series of deep valleys running far into the mountains, which in some cases rise to an altitude of 1,800 or 1,900 feet above the level of the sea. The narrowness of these valleys defies the skill of the architect and surveyor to construct compact colliery villages on the square block plan of America. The only method which can be adopted is to build the cottages parallel with the roadway through the valley. Occasionally there are a few short streets rising in terraces one above another on the slope of the hill. It is a curious fact that

the Rhondda Vawr valley is practically one street, fifteen miles long, and the Rhondda Vach valley, one street of about twelve miles in length. These two long streets contain a population of nearly 100,000. It is therefore quite clear that this peculiar but essential mode of constructing these colliery villages creates a serious difficulty in forming libraries, because it is human nature after all for every person to contend that a library or any other institution should be situated as near his residence as possible, and he looks with a jealous eye upon any attempt which might be made to give his fellow workman an advantage over him in point of distance. Thus it frequently happens that miners working close together in the mine may be very far separated in their homes. Two colliers often reach the surface together. The home of the one is two miles "up" the valley, whilst the other has to proceed for the same distance "down" the valley. The location of a colliery library becomes therefore a difficult matter to settle. Friction and strife are often engendered during these initial stages of the movement which generally bring matters to an abrupt and barren termination, thus leaving the particular district without any provision for the pursuit of knowledge. Various expedients for coping with this difficulty have been suggested, but so far very little progress has been made. In a few of the larger colliery districts the experiment of opening branch reading rooms has been tried, but the success has not always been equal to the efforts put forth in this direction. It is to be hoped, however, that the spread of knowledge and the extension of our educational system, by means of the elementary, higher grade, and intermediate schools, will eventually solve this difficulty, and that the various school buildings and other educational establishments in the colliery districts may ultimately be made available for reading rooms and libraries for the use of colliers and others engaged in the industries of the district.

Another obstacle which interferes largely with the formation of colliery libraries is the migratory character of the collier. It must be remembered that when a collier starts to earn his livelihood at a certain colliery, he does not always make that colliery his permanent home. When he becomes older and more experienced he sometimes looks beyond his own immediate neighbourhood with a view of seeking "fresh fields and pastures new." Whether rightly or wrongly, it is a general belief that better wages can be earned in a district where a new colliery is beginning to develop than in a district where a colliery has been

working for some years. It is within my own recollection that when the Rhondda valley was beginning to open out in the latter years of the sixties and the early days of the seventies, a large number of colliers and other workmen emigrated from the Merthyr and Aberdare valleys to the collieries in the Rhondda, with the intention of improving their position, and I have no doubt that the same tendency to emigrate still continues. Having regard to this fact, it is evident that workmen who did not regard a certain place as their permanent abode, would feel some diffidence in supporting a movement which would entail a pecuniary sacrifice on their part, and which might eventually be of no benefit to themselves or their children. Moreover, a very large number, and probably the majority of this migratory class, is composed of the younger workmen whose opinions and votes frequently predominate, and thus an adverse vote is often given to a proposal or suggestion emanating from older and more thoughtful workmen.

I believe, however, that this migratory propensity is not so prevalent at the present time as it was some years ago. The younger class of workmen are also becoming impregnated with an ardent thirst for knowledge. Consequently, it will be easier to deal with this difficulty in the future than in the past. It should be mentioned here as a gratifying fact that on several occasions some of the best science scholarships, including the Whitworth, have been won by Welsh working lads.

Another obstacle which, in my opinion, must be taken as a factor in dealing with this subject, is the great love of music which is such a striking feature of Celtic life.

I am well aware that I am here treading on dangerous ground. It is far from my desire to say anything to discourage the cultivation of the art which has done so much to bring the National character of the Welsh into prominence. I merely wish to strike a note of warning.

The old saying "*Mor o gan yw Cymru i Gyd*" is as true today as it was when first uttered. There may, however, be a danger of overstepping the bounds with regard to music. Our younger people may devote more of their time to this particular branch of knowledge than is justifiable. In these days of great choral competitions for which very substantial prizes are offered, the cultivation of the art of singing may perhaps receive more than its due share of attention, to the detriment of other subjects which would doubtless be more advantageous to the student in

after years. If our young colliers could be induced to learn other useful subjects simultaneously with the study of music, great good might result and a powerful impetus might be given thereby to the formation of colliery libraries and kindred institutions.

I have briefly alluded to these difficulties in order to deter us from forming an unjust opinion or judging too hastily the people we are seeking to elevate and improve.

Notwithstanding all that has been said as to the difficulties and obstacles which stand in the way, I do not consider them insuperable. In fact, what has been done already in several localities of this great coalfield, clearly demonstrates that they may to a great extent be overcome. There are, I am pleased to say, a considerable number of colliery libraries established for the benefit of the workmen which are to-day thriving and prosperous institutions. Before I allude to them in detail, I should like to say a word with regard to recent legislative enactments, which in my opinion, have been a great incentive to the formation of colliery libraries. I allude more particularly to the passing of Free Education and the Parish Council Acts.

Before the former measure became law, it was the custom in the majority of our colliery districts, to provide for the maintenance of our elementary schools by the deduction of a certain amount from the wages of the workmen. This deduction, which was termed "poundage," amounted as a rule to about a penny in the pound of wages earned, and, with the grant made by Government was applied for the maintenance of elementary schools. When Parliament provided for the sole maintenance of schools by the system which is paradoxically termed "Free Education," this "poundage" was no longer required for educational purposes in this particular form, but to the credit of the workmen be it said, in several of the collieries the "poundage" has been continued by them, and has, in most cases, been applied for the maintenance of colliery libraries and reading rooms. It need hardly be mentioned that this is a remarkably easy way of grappling with the difficulty of maintaining these institutions, and if this system could be adopted and applied generally, there is no reason why a library should not be formed in connection with every colliery in the district. It is rather premature to speak of the operations of the other Act, but there can be little doubt that the Parish Councils Act, which gives the members of the Parish Council power to form village libraries, will be specially

advantageous in colliery districts, and it ought to be a valuable adjunct to the attempts made by the workmen to form libraries under the joint management of their representatives and members of the Parish Council.

It is also due to the employers of labour that a word should be said as to their desire and readiness to assist the workmen in obtaining knowledge. Many colliery proprietors have contributed handsomely towards this purpose, and in several instances have either wholly or in part erected substantial libraries where the workmen can, after their day's toil, obtain all the knowledge and recreation available. In a few instances the royalty owners have materially assisted the efforts of the workmen and employers, but I regret to say that the help obtained from this source has not been of a general character.

I would also point out that, although the majority of these libraries and reading rooms are of recent creation, others have been established for a considerable number of years; in fact, the Merthyr library, though strictly speaking not a workmen's library, has been established since the year 1846, and therefore, in point of time, takes precedence of our splendid library at Cardiff, which only dates back to the year 1861. This excellent library contains about 6,000 volumes, exclusive of the rare Welsh library bequeathed to the institution by the late Thomas Stephens, the renowned author of the *Literature of the Kymry*. The institution possesses freehold property on the Court Estate. It is maintained by a subscription of 6s. 6d. per annum, and is managed by a committee elected annually. It would be well to mention here that the case of Merthyr is a remarkable illustration of what has been previously mentioned as to the geographical difficulty. The citizens have for years been striving to adopt the Public Libraries Act in the borough. The feeling in the town seems to be overwhelmingly in favour of such a course, but as the location of the public library would naturally be in the centre of the district, the proposal to adopt the Act has invariably been defeated by an adverse vote of the ratepayers residing at the extremities of the borough.

The Dowlais Library, a handsome edifice, was erected in the year 1852 to commemorate the death of Sir J. J. Guest, the father of the present Lord Wimbourne. It is the private property of the Dowlais Company, and is maintained by them. The London and local daily and weekly newspapers are taken, and the Dowlais workmen have free access to the building at all times.

The Rhymney Library was established in the year 1853, but up to the commencement of the year 1894, it was principally maintained by the tradesmen of the locality. The building was given gratis by the Rhymney Iron and Coal Co. Since 1894, as a result of the Free Education Act, the workmen subscribe $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per week towards the cost of maintenance. This library contains about 1,000 volumes, and three London dailies, and all local dailies and weeklies, and several magazines, including the London Illustrated, Strand, Scribner's, &c., are taken in.

A library containing 500 volumes was established at New Tredegar in the year 1873 at a cost of £1,500. It is maintained by a contribution of a penny per fortnight per man and boy, and a subscription of a shilling per quarter from tradesmen and others. The Cardiff dailies, weeklies, local papers, and all Welsh papers are taken in. There are reading rooms at Brithdir and Pontlottyn in connection with this library for the convenience of the workmen residing in those localities.

A library was formed in the year 1880 at Merthyr Vale, in connection with the Coffee Tavern, principally by the Nixon's Navigation Co. The Cardiff daily papers are taken in, and billiards, draughts, &c., are provided. The building is open to workmen.

The Cwmparc Library, which was established in 1880, is held in an old mission room, which is about to be enlarged with an addition of lecture room, &c., at an estimated cost of £1,300. The cost of maintenance, about £100 per annum, is met by poundage from workmen. For several years prior to the passing of the Free Education Act, the sum of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the pound was paid to the library fund, but since the passing of that Act, 1d. in the pound is paid. Number of volumes, 1,000. The London dailies, local weekly Welsh and English papers, and about thirty periodicals and magazines are taken in.

The Maerdy Library was established in 1882. The building was given gratuitously by the colliery owners, and the cost of maintenance, about £230 per annum, is met by subscriptions from the workmen. Number of volumes, 1,700, and about sixty-six newspapers and periodicals are taken in.

The Blaina Reading Room and Institute was established in 1884, and a new building was built in 1893 at a cost of £1,968. The cost of maintenance, which amounts to about £230 per annum, is met by members' contributions and the proceeds of an annual concert, with a donation of £10 from Messrs. John

Lancaster & Co., and other private subscriptions. Number of volumes, 434. The London and local daily and weekly newspapers and a large number of magazines and periodicals are provided. This institute is not confined to colliery workmen, although they form the majority of the membership.

A magnificent library and institute exists at Blaenavon. It was originally established in 1883, and in 1895 was removed to the present buildings, which cost nearly £10,000. It contains 1,600 volumes, and the principal newspapers and periodicals are taken in. It is maintained by a contribution of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per week from the workmen, and a subscription of 6s. per annum from outsiders. The management is vested in a committee of workmen.

The library of Hafod was formed in the year 1884, and is held in a building lent by the Lewis Merthyr Coal Co. It contains nearly 1,300 volumes, and is maintained by a contribution of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per week from the workmen. Unfortunately, the workmen ceased paying contributions during the haulier's strike of 1893, but it is to be sincerely hoped that this false step will soon be retraced. For the convenience of workmen living at a distance, a branch of this library has been established at Porth.

The Cwmtillery Library, containing 430 volumes, was established in 1884, at a cost of £425. It is maintained by a contribution of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the pound of the men's earnings. Among the newspapers and periodicals taken here is the *Carpenter and Builder*. There is a branch reading room at Tillery Colliery.

Plymouth Collieries. Two reading rooms in cottages are given free of rent and coal by the proprietors. The members pay 1s. per quarter. There are no books. The London and local dailies are taken in.

The Abercarne Library, Reading and Recreation Rooms were established in 1888, and occupy four rooms under the Public Hall, at a rental of £40 per annum. It is maintained by subscriptions of 1d. per fortnight from the workmen, and $6\frac{1}{2}$ d. per quarter from outside members. The annual cost of maintenance is £200. The number of volumes, 920, and the London and local daily and weekly newspapers and leading periodicals are taken in. There are two billiard rooms, one reading room, and a lending department. The institute is managed by a committee of twenty.

The Treharris Workmen and Tradesmen's Library was

opened on October 1st, 1884. It is located, free of charge, in the Workmen's Hall, and maintained by a contribution of 1½d. per month from the workmen, and 3s. per annum from tradesmen, &c. It contains 1,460 volumes, and about sixty newspapers and periodicals are taken in. A branch library has been formed at Nelson for the convenience of the Treharris workmen living in that locality.

The Pontypridd Free Library was established in 1887, but it existed some years previous to that date as a reading room. The building cost £3,000 and is maintained by a contribution of 1d. in the £ on the rates, which produces about £400 per annum. It contains nearly 5,000 volumes and all the principal London and provincial daily and weekly papers, and the majority of the leading periodicals of the day are taken in.

The Cwmaman Library containing 1,400 volumes was established in 1879. A new building, including a public hall, was erected in 1892. Cost £1,800. It is maintained by a contribution of ½d. in the £ from the workmen. The leading periodicals and Welsh and English papers are taken in. Billiards, chess, draughts, &c., are provided. A notable feature in connection with this library is a reading room for boys under sixteen years of age. This room contains 200 books, and suitable games are also provided, in addition to which the Committee provide a magic lantern, and subscribe £5 for a teacher of arithmetic for evening classes.

The Cilfynydd Library and Reading Room was established in the year 1888 in two ante-rooms under the Methodist Chapel of the village. In May, 1894, the Workmen's Hall and Reading Room, especially erected at a cost of £3,500, were opened. The Albion Steam Coal Company contributed £500 towards the cost. The library is maintained by a contribution of ¼d. in the £ of men's earnings, and is managed by a committee appointed by them. The Pontypridd Free Library Committee have been asked to make a contribution towards the maintenance of the library, inasmuch as the district is taxed in support of that institution, and it is hoped that a satisfactory settlement will be effected. There are as yet no books provided, but all the leading daily and weekly papers and a large number of English and Welsh magazines and periodicals are taken in. The edifice contains a splendid room for holding meetings, concerts, &c.

The Tredegar Working Men's Institute and Library, containing 1,943 English and 149 Welsh volumes, was established in

1890. It is maintained by weekly contributions of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. from workmen, and 1s. 6d. per quarter from tradesmen and others, at a cost of about £370 per annum; seventy-two newspapers, periodicals and magazines are taken in. Billiards, draughts, and other games are provided. A special feature of this library is a room for ladies, where suitable literature, &c., is provided. There is also a museum containing several cases of fossils, specimens of manufactures from raw materials, &c. The Institute is managed by a joint committee of workmen, tradesmen, &c. There is a branch reading room at Troedrihiwgwair, a distance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the central, and it is contemplated to open another reading room on an early date at Dukestown, a corresponding distance in the other direction.

The Treorky Library was established in 1890, but failed after a few months owing to the lack of accommodation. The present building was opened in June, 1895, and the approximate cost is £3,500. This is also maintained by workmen's contributions. The number of volumes is 600, which, with the exception of a few private donations, have been presented by the Treorky Eisteddfod Committee. The London and local newspapers, and about 20 magazines and periodicals are taken in.

Vochriw. A reading room was started a few years ago in a cottage given rent free by the Dowlais Iron Company. There are a few books, and the local daily and weekly papers, and a few others are taken in.

Bedlinog. The same arrangements prevail here as at Vochriw.

The Pentre and Tynybedw Collieries Library contains 1,920 volumes. The building, which cost about £3,000, was given gratuitously to the workmen by Clifford J. Cory, Esq. The London and daily papers and local evening papers, and about thirty-nine periodicals and magazines are taken in. The cost of maintenance, about £200, is met by subscription. There are three other branches in course of construction at Treorky, Ton, and Ystrad Rhondda, respectively.

Cymmer has a magnificent building containing 439 volumes. It was erected in 1893 at a cost of £2,400. It is maintained by workmen's contributions of 1d. per week. Nine dailies, thirty-four weeklies, one fortnightly, fourteen monthlies, one bi-monthly, and two quarterlies are taken in. This building contains a splendid hall for meetings, &c.

The Standard Colliery Library, Ynyshir, containing 101

volumes, was established in 1893. Cost of building, £650. It is maintained by a $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per week contribution from the workmen. Welsh and English newspapers and periodicals are taken in, and the annual cost of maintenance is about £80.

Risca and Cross Keys. (1894.) A room is rented by the committee and maintained by workmen's contributions. No books have as yet been purchased. The usual papers and periodicals are taken in.

Some thirty years ago a library was formed at Aberdare, mainly through the efforts of the Rev. J. Griffiths, the then Vicar, and the late Rev. Dr. Price. After passing through many vicissitudes, it has become extinct. Several attempts have been made to form a Public Library, but each proposal has been defeated by an antagonistic vote of the ratepayers of the outlying districts. In the year 1887, a valuable site was offered for the purpose of a public library, by Sir William Thomas Lewis, in addition to a handsome donation of £1,500 from Lord Bute, but strange to say, these generous offers were rejected. There is, however, a library connected with the workmen's club, and with both political clubs in the town. There is also a reading room connected with the Powell Duffryn Collieries, at Aberaman, and at the present time a movement is on foot to erect a substantial hall and institute in that locality, which will be supported by voluntary contributions from the workmen. In Aberdare, as in many other places, there are numerous libraries in connection with the Sunday schools belonging to the various denominations through the district.

Gelli. No library has yet been formed, but the workmen have subscribed £300, and to this Mr. Clifford J. Cory has promised to add £500.

A library and institute has been built in connection with the Maindy and Eastern pits at Ton Pentre, which will be opened in the course of the next month or so. The approximate cost is about £4,000.

The National Colliery workmen propose building an assembly room for the purpose of holding workmen's and friendly societies' meetings and to be used as a mission room, and for evangelistic and other purposes. They propose having a room for billiards, bagatelle, &c., and a reading room for the men. It will be maintained by a subscription from the workmen of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per week, and will be built by private subscriptions from royalty owners, colliery proprietors, and other people interested in the

district. Books will be bought with the surplus. It is also proposed to give lectures on mining and other scientific subjects, and to have technical classes if possible, in order to give those interested a chance of entering for mining scholarships at the University Colleges.

Although the foregoing list is very incomplete it shows that the libraries enumerated cost upwards of £30,000 and have nearly 29,000 volumes, and that the annual cost of maintenance, provided mainly by the workmen, is no inconsiderable item.

These details are interesting as showing that there is a great awakening among the mining community with regard to this question of colliery libraries.

A future occasion may enable me to continue the record and to enter more minutely into the organisation, management and maintenance of these institutions. In conclusion, I may be permitted to say that a most important requirement in the formation of a colliery library is method, and if the efforts of the promoters could, at the outset, be directed into the proper channel, the difficulties to which I have previously alluded would, to a great extent, disappear. It seems to me that some scheme of affiliating colliery and village libraries with the public libraries of large towns might be productive of great good.

What is essential to the success of a colliery library is a fair start on a sound and proper basis. A little advice at the commencement may subsequently save the promoters endless trouble and anxiety, and place the institution beyond any fear of failure. The friends who advocate the formation of colliery libraries are invariably conscientious and well-meaning men, but they generally embark upon a movement of this kind with very little knowledge and less experience. The result is disappointment and failure. To those about to form libraries I would strongly recommend the excellent pamphlet prepared by Mr. Frank J. Burgoyne (Librarian of Lambeth), Mr. J. D. Brown (Librarian of Clerkenwell), and Mr. J. Ballinger (Librarian of Cardiff), containing a list of 1,000 of the most suitable books for village libraries. If the instructions contained therein are observed, and the lists carefully followed in the selection of the books, many a dangerous rock will be avoided, and the colliery library, once fairly and safely launched, will soon find itself sailing successfully in smooth waters. Now that Wales has, in common with the rest of the kingdom, been blest with intermediate schools and University colleges, a great deal may be expected of her sons and

daughters. The mining community in the principality have done nobly in the past. It has established and maintained a sliding scale which has brought in its train peace, harmony and prosperity. It has its Permanent Provident Society, which has succoured hundreds of afflicted widows and orphans, and brightened tens of thousands of homes. It is striving to place old and infirm miners beyond the reach of poverty and sorrow, and if a good system of colliery libraries can be added, the social edifice of the mining community in "Gallant Little Wales" will be practically complete.

EVAN OWEN,

*General Secretary of the Monmouthshire
and South Wales Miners' Permanent
Provident Society.*